

# LET'S LOOK AT OURSELVES



**A BRIEF GUIDE FOR CONDUCTING  
A COMMUNITY AUDIT**

# LET'S LOOK AT OURSELVES

SOMETHING'S been happening around the country that has folks sitting up to take notice. People are walking around with pads and pencils in their hands, making notes and muttering about audits and tallies. This has nothing to do with the new tax schedules. Americans haven't suddenly turned amateur accountants. It's a new citizenship game that's got them buzzing — a game that could be described as "Let's Look At Ourselves."

What's it all about? Just this: in town after town people want to know just how well Americans are enjoying, in practice, the freedoms and guarantees that have in theory been part of our heritage throughout our history. There is only one way to find out and that is to look around; to listen to testimony; to dig in and study the facts. In a small city, study the whole city. In large cities, survey single neighborhoods.

Some months ago the President's Committee on Civil Rights came out with a report that rocked the nation. The Committee found that America was still far short of the great goals set up in our Constitution and Bill of Rights. The Committee called on the American people to do something now to wipe out segregation and discrimination and assure civil rights for all our people.

The job is big and it starts at home — in every home town in the nation.

A community audit can be started by a handful of community leaders who really believe in democracy and want to make it work.

The project should be based on the Report of the President's Committee on Civil Rights. For years to come those who cherish democracy in America will be using that Report as a textbook for action. It is the standard by which you can measure civil rights in your own town. If your town starts a civil rights audit, let the people know what that Report says. Publicize the Report

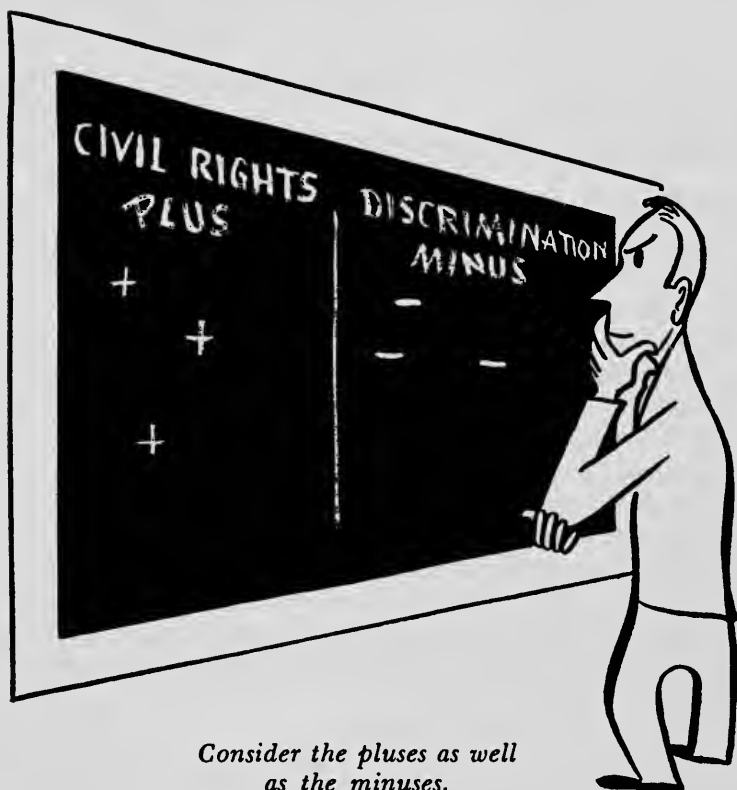
during the entire period of investigation. Use the Civil Rights Report to arouse the public conscience against whatever shortcomings your study uncovers.

## Scope of a Community Audit on Civil Rights

**W**HEN YOU start on an Audit on Civil Rights, you'll have to choose between doing a big job or a little job or a medium-sized job. You can, if you want to, undertake a full-dress scientific study, but in most instances *volunteer* participation is the best. Nearly every city can do what Montclair, New Jersey, did. The citizens of Montclair conducted their Civil Rights Audit without paid professional help — just average citizens who got together and organized a community audit in Montclair. The result? — a report that's made history. Now the people of Montclair know where they stand on civil rights. They know where to begin with a program to make Montclair a better place for all its people. And, in the process of taking a good look at themselves, they built up renewed public interest in civil rights.



*People are walking around with pads and pencils in their hands.*



*Consider the pluses as well  
as the minuses.*

This memo is about the Montclair type of community audit of civil rights. It outlines the kind of study that can be carried out with local volunteers only. It is the most simple type of audit. But, even though the facts in your final report are simple, you must make sure that they are correct and can be defended if challenged. Mark out a program that does not go beyond what you can do. Consider the pluses as well as the minuses; take the deserved pats on the back along with the criticisms. This kind of survey does not have to be too scientifically directed and controlled. Its greatest value will be educational. Those who participate will learn things about their own town that they had not recognized clearly before. Their final report to the community will be a "home-grown" document that the community can under-

stand and accept. Such a report can awaken many of the people of your own town who would never read a sociological survey of your or any other community. "Let's Look At Ourselves" is the watchword for this kind of community audit.

## ***What to Investigate***

**D**ISCRIMINATION against minority groups shows itself mainly in the following areas:

- A) Employment (this includes exclusion from jobs as well as unequal wages for equal work.)
- B) Housing (especially restrictive covenants and rent gouges of minority groups.)
- C) Education (school and college treatment of faculty and students.)
- D) Public Accommodations (restaurants, stores, theaters, bowling-alleys, swimming pools, etc.)
- E) Health (hospitals, clinics, etc. both for patients and staff.)
- F) Recreation (clubs, community centers, public recreation departments, etc.)

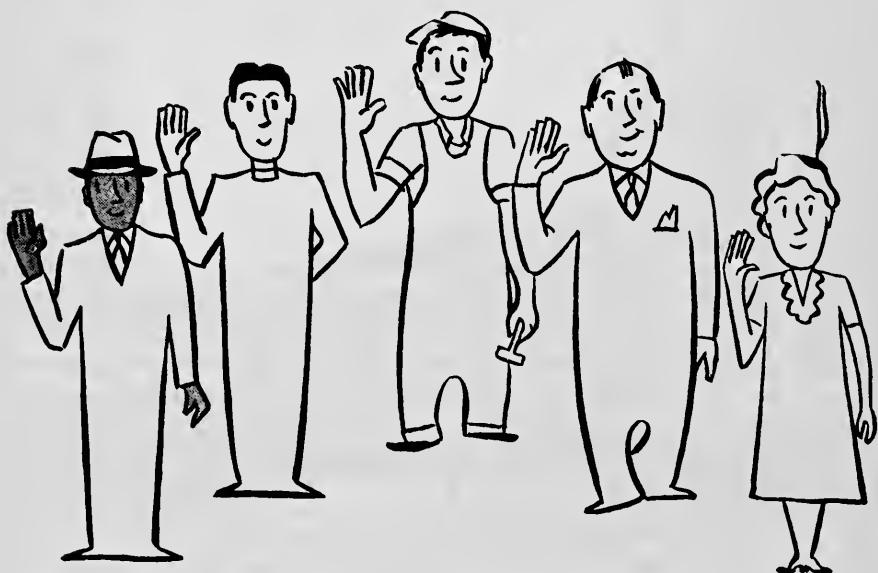
These areas can be investigated by local volunteers without too much difficulty. All that is needed is to organize the volunteers into a workable system of operation.

## ***How to Organize***

**Y**OU CAN get started by calling together just a few people—especially those who have already indicated some interest in the problem. Talk to them about the Civil Rights Report of the President's Committee. Show them what was done in Montclair and other towns. Discuss the advantages of the simple self-survey carried on by local people. Figure out with them what persons and what organizations should be drawn into participation from the outset. You may find people who are really concerned about civil rights but haven't known what to do about it before. Appoint a small committee and draw up a tentative program of action.

At the next meeting ask for the names of other potential volunteers and of sponsoring agencies. Plan to get volunteers from

labor groups, churches, unions, businessmen, veterans, and other organizations. It is essential that the people taking part shall represent all important groups in the community. If only "social reformers" or minority groups take part, the whole effort may be less effective. At this meeting involve enough persons with sufficient backing to recruit the needed personnel and to get sponsorship of desirable organizations. Present the tentative plan of operation prepared by your committee and modify it to suit those who are present.



*Plan to get volunteers from many organizations.*

At the third meeting, decide which organizations are to act as sponsors. Also, discuss the tentative plan and revise it into a final program which will serve as a blueprint for the audit. Your plan should be fitted to the size of your town. It should be based on the number of people who will take part in the audit. It should be modified according to the amount of work that can be under-

taken. At this meeting a permanent chairman and a permanent secretary should be chosen, each of whom must be willing to give enough time to the job to co-ordinate all parts of the survey. A small steering committee must share the tasks of direction and co-ordination. At the third meeting, or maybe a fourth, work should be assigned to the investigators.

The actual work of investigation should be assigned to teams of about six persons each, with a leader who accepts responsibility for each team's performance. Each team should obtain the aid of as many additional people as can be usefully drawn into its part of the auditing project. Each team needs its own chairman, vice-chairman and secretary, all working closely and continuously throughout the project. All teams should have a deadline of three or four months to complete their reports. When possible, interim reports of progress should also be made to be sure that things are running along according to schedule and combined plan. People with special knowledge of an area of interest should be assigned to an appropriate team. For example, businessmen and labor representatives should be included on the team which will study discrimination in employment. Real estate agents should go on the housing team, etc.

## ***Method of Investigation***

**T**HE PLAN for each team should be based upon a very simple statement of its goals. What do you want to find out? Take housing, for example: Are there restrictions against ownership or rental of property in any part of the town directed against citizens of certain racial or religious origin? How many restrictive covenants have been recorded in the County Clerk's office? Has the number of such recorded deeds increased or decreased in recent years? Against which minorities are these restrictive covenants directed? Are there any discriminatory practices against minorities as to the rental of houses or apartments? In how many cases? These and similar questions should be spelled out as a guide for

the volunteers on each investigating team. Make use of available data wherever those are reliable. List in advance the appropriate sources from which the answers to these questions may be obtained.

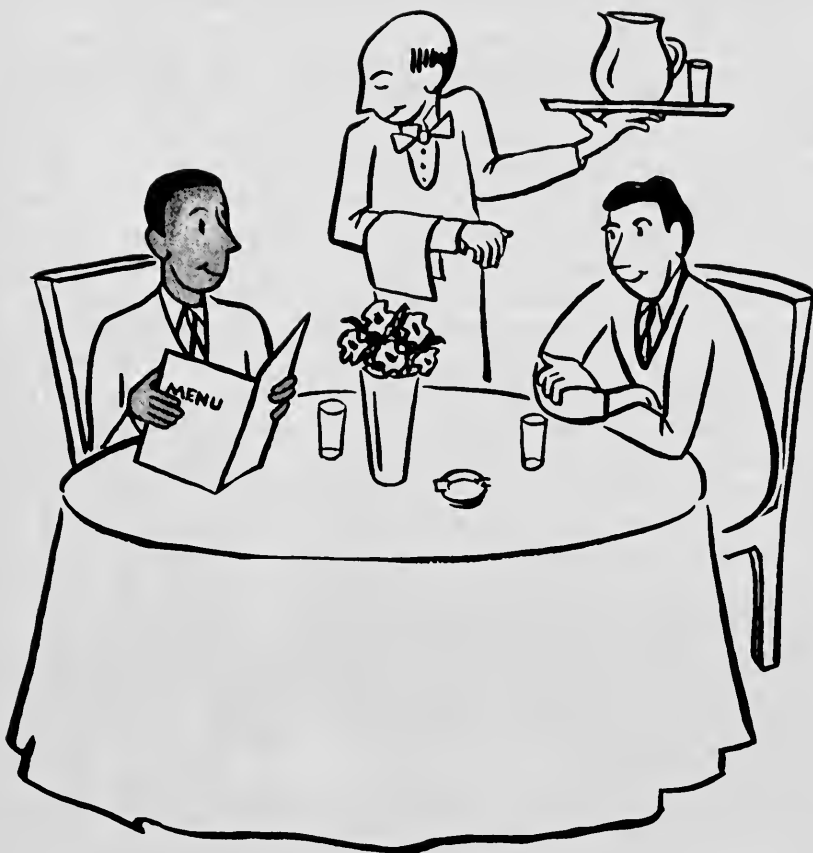
In some instances your volunteers will investigate by searching official records; in other cases they will want to talk with public officials. Specific information and leads can be obtained by direct discussion with the members of minority groups who have experienced discrimination at first hand. Wherever possible, check statements of individuals, public officials, etc. against existing facts for verification. Some aspects of the audit can be explored best through the direct tactic of personal experiment. For example, alleged discriminatory practices of restaurants and other public facilities can be verified best by the direct test of having persons who are likely to meet discrimination try to get service in such places, in the company of people who will surely be acceptable. There should be no insistence on service. The object at this point is mainly to obtain information. In Montclair, such experiments were carried out by mixed teams, with some members of the team sitting at separate tables and making careful observation of the kind of service rendered to the others.

A system should be established for the careful recording of all information collected by the teams. Reports should be written and submitted at weekly meetings of each survey team.

Your social audit should be carried on for a long enough period to insure full coverage of all places where discrimination can happen; three or four months is only a suggestion. Be sure you get enough material to make a solid contribution of knowledge. You would like to know, of course, what the situation is in *every* restaurant in your community, and you would like to be able to report on the hiring policy of *every* employer in your town. Since you cannot gather information about all of these except in very small towns, be careful to plan a good sampling. Don't select only doubtful restaurants. In the list of restaurants to be sampled include not only those you need to investigate to determine their attitude but also restaurants whose policies — good and bad — are well known.

How much time and effort will be needed can be gauged by the fact that in a city or neighborhood of 25,000 to 50,000 popula-





*Discriminatory practices can be verified best by test.*

tion, 35 people giving two evenings a week can do a good job in about 12 weeks, covering the six areas of investigation.

## ***Presenting the Balance Sheet***

**T**HE BALANCE SHEET is the pay-off! A social audit on civil rights in your town will be worthwhile only if it results in a clear and accurate statement, backed up by solid facts. Draw up

your civil rights Balance Sheet and show in it what the virtues of your town are and what are its faults. Wake up your community with facts.

When you present your final report to your community, it should be planned and publicized as a major civic event. Plan a big mass meeting of citizens. Get all the newspaper and radio publicity you can. Brief the press and radio people ahead of time, asking them to hold the publicity until you are ready for it. Make sure that all the organizations that were drawn in from the beginning are properly represented at the meeting. Select one of the most outstanding citizens of your town as chairman. Have him describe the program — what the purposes and methods of the survey are. Let the chairman of each sub-committee give a ten-minute report on his team's part of the total survey.

When all the reports are completed, make an official presentation of copies to the library and to leading city officials.

Say to your town, "we decided to look at ourselves and this is what we found out." Give the facts a chance to sink in.

*Wake up your  
community with facts.*





*After Montclair's audit, Negro physicians were appointed to hospital staffs.*

## **And Then Go On**

**T**ELL YOUR citizens what they can do from this point forward. Hold meetings at which speakers describe the way in which each organization can continue its interest in civil rights. Use films, film strips and recordings to liven up your meetings. Some people may want to set up discussion groups or bring in outside speakers on civil rights. Others may want to undertake social action for federal, state and local laws against discrimination. When the citizens of Montclair had finished the self-survey of their own town, public opinion was sufficiently aroused to carry through at least a few desirable changes in social practices. For the first time, Negro physicians were appointed to the consulting staff of the local hospital and permitted to treat their own patients in the hospital. The school system undertook to promote a program of intergroup education among its teachers. These are samples



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of the kind of progress that a self-survey on civil rights can help to bring about.

Encourage plans for periodic re-audits, so your community can get a picture of its own progress over a period of time. What you find out about your own town — if dramatically presented to all its citizens — can be the inspiration and the guide to a really effective program of social action.

“Let’s Look At Ourselves” will take us many steps ahead on the road to fulfillment of all of our American ideals.

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*For additional copies write to*

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